WILDSTORM UNIVERSE

#5
Dec

Suggested
For Mature
Readers

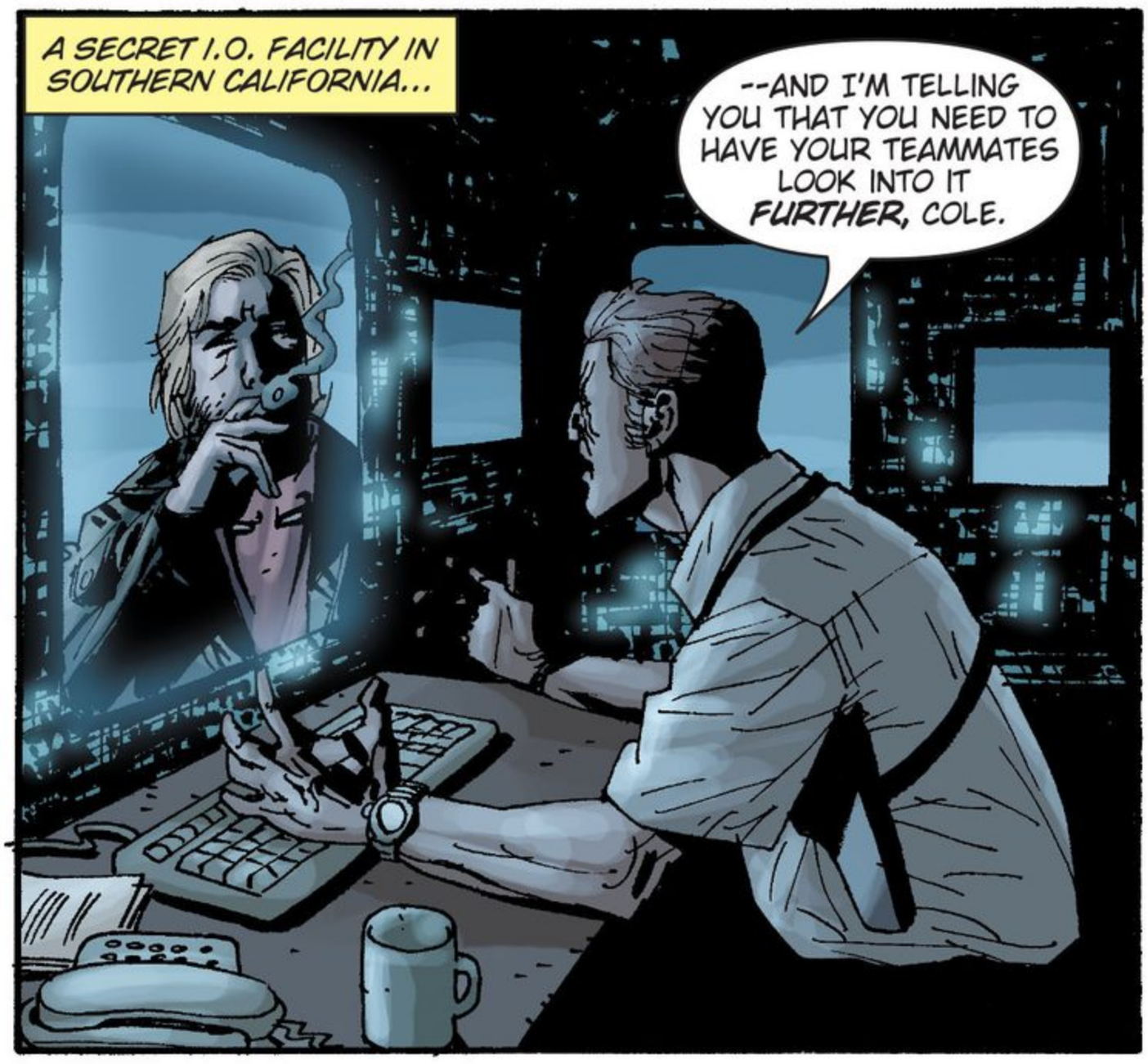
sleeper™

season two

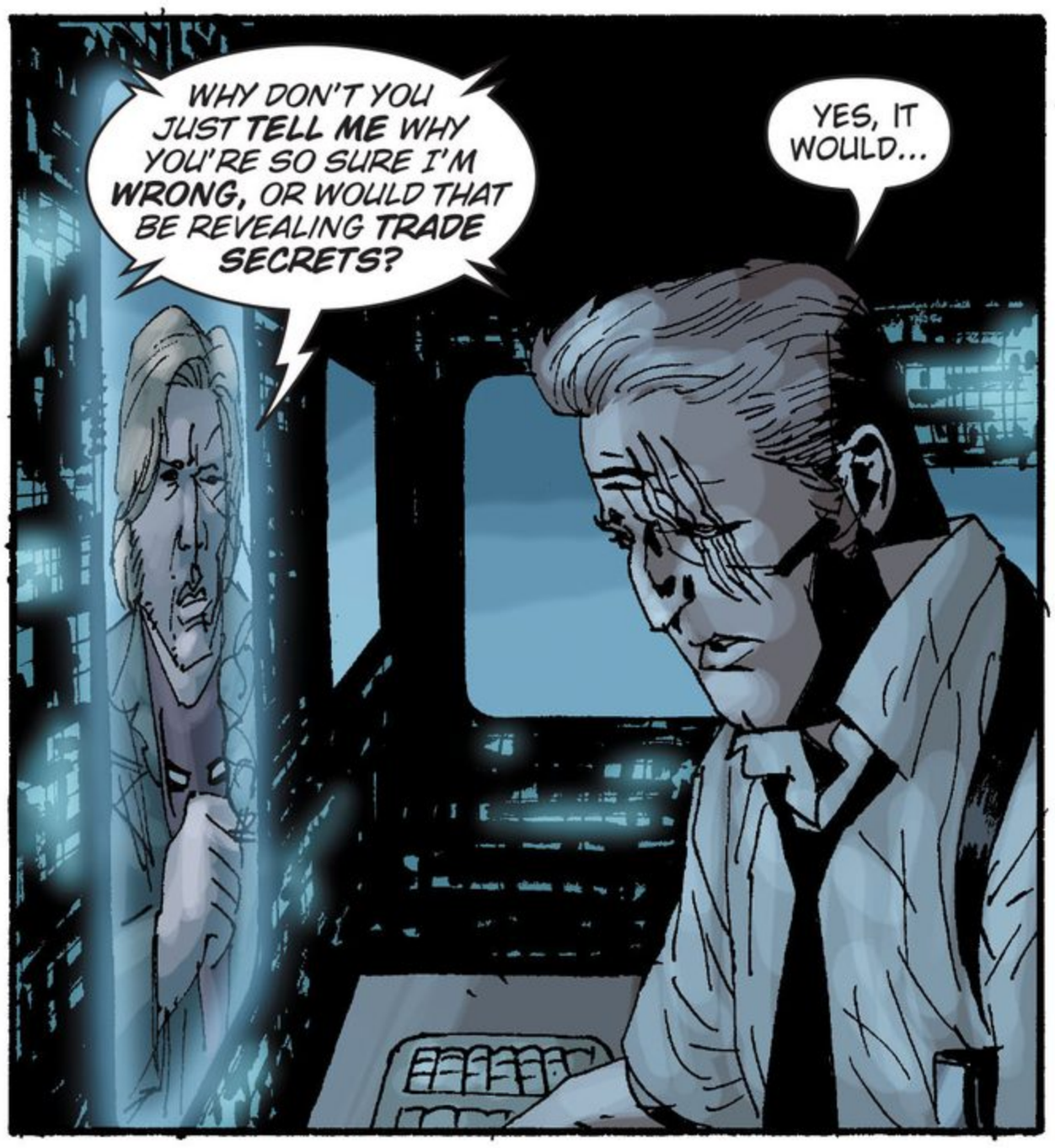
ED BRUBAKER
SEAN PHILLIPS

Wildstorm.com

EIGHT YEARS AGO


A SECRET I.O. FACILITY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA...
--AND I'M TELLING YOU THAT YOU NEED TO HAVE YOUR TEAMMATES LOOK INTO IT FURTHER, COLE.

LYNCH, I SAW HIM VAPORIZED WITH MY OWN EYES JUST TWO DAYS AGO.
SO, I KNOW YOU'RE A PARANOID PRICK WHO THINKS HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO DO ANY-FUCKING-THING RIGHT...



LOOK, JUST DO THIS AS A FAVOR TO ME, COLE, FOR OLD TIMES. HAVE MAJESTIC RUN FULL-SPECTRUM SCANS ON THE AREA OF DEATH. SEE IF HE CAN SPOT ANYTHING.

I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO.

LYNCH OUT.

SAT-COM CONTROL? THIS IS COMMANDER LYNCH. HOW SOON CAN YOU GET ME IMAGERY OVER FLORIDA?

YES, I NEED ***FULL PENETRATION***-- SONAR AND HEAT, TOO.

TOO SLOW. TRANSFER ME TO TACTICAL...

YES, THIS IS ***LYNCH.*** I NEED A ***BLACK OPS TEAM*** IN MIAMI, ***NOW.*** I'VE GOT A TARGET ON THE MOVE.

HEY MISTER, YOU ***OKAY*** IN THERE?

YES, GO ***AWAY,*** PLEASE.

CHRIST IN HELL... ***OUCH.***

PLING

PINK

AND HERE I THOUGHT YOU WERE A ***BRAIN TUMOR*** ALL THESE YEARS.

BUT WHERE DID YOU ***COME FROM?*** THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE TO KNOW.

GUESS THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT...

*--RAN INTO A BIT OF A **PROBLEM,** SIR.*

WHAT?

YOUR UN-SUB APPEARS TO HAVE ***REMOVED*** HIS GPS SO HE COULD LEAD US ON AN ASSGRAB ALL OVER HELL.

HE REMOVED A GPS FROM INSIDE HIS HEAD?

YES SIR, COMMANDER. SHOVED IT UP THE ASS OF A STRAY CAT.

ONE OF MY MEN BLEW IT TO SHIT JUST TO VOUCH-SAFE YOUR GUY WASN'T A SHAPE-SHIFTER.

WHY WOULD HE...?

OH FUCK... HE'S WATCHING YOU!

THAT BASTARD SON OF A BITCH IS WATCHING YOU RIGHT NOW!

SIR? I'VE GOT NO ONE IN VISUAL AT ALL.

HE'S THERE. SWEEP THE AREA. FIND HIM AND TAKE HIM DOWN.

KILL HIM IF YOU HAVE TO.

SIR, YES SIR!

TANGO TEAM 2, THIS IS TANGO LEADER... GIVE ME YOUR 20, OVER.

TEAM 2, THIS IS LEADER, COME *BACK*, OVER.

LISTEN TO ME, SERGEANT. GET TO YOUR EXTRACTION, *NOW!*

BUT SIR, MY MEN ARE--

UKKKK!

NO...

*NOW, **THIS** IS INTERESTING...*

*...AN INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS ASSASSINATION SQUAD SENT AFTER **ME**? HUNH.*

*AND WHO, I WONDER, MIGHT **YOU** BE?*

Cat's Cradle

FIVE YEARS AGO

--TARGET IS KNOWN AS T.A.O.--OR, THE *T*ACTICALLY *A*UGMENTED *O*RGANISM.

UNTIL A WEEK AGO, WHEN HE SENT A ***LETTER*** TO AN OLD GIRLFRIEND, MOST OF THE WORLD THOUGHT HE WAS DEAD.

T.A.O.

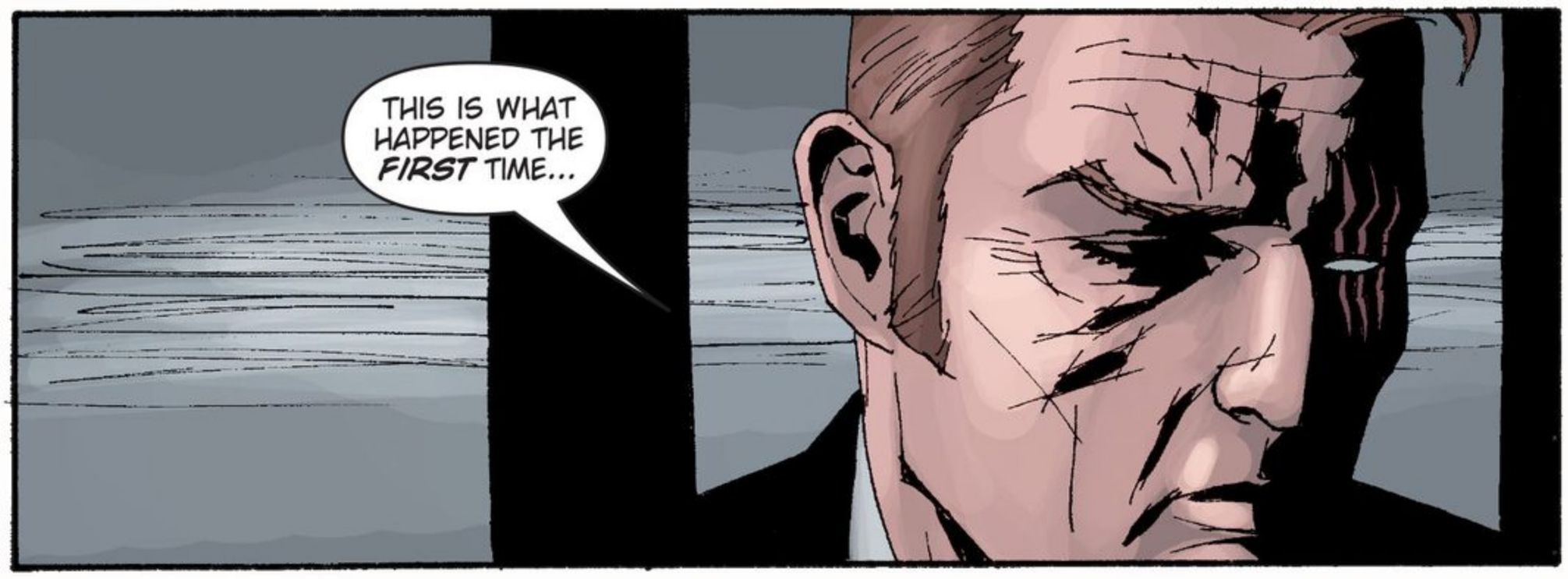
MOST OF THE WORLD.

BUT NOT ***ME.***

THE ***EXTENT*** OF HIS POWERS ISN'T KNOWN, BUT MOST ARE ***MENTAL.*** YOU'LL BE EQUIPPED WITH SONIC BLOCKERS, SO IF HE TALKS YOU'LL HEAR NOTHING BUT STATIC.

BUT EVEN IF HE CAN'T GET INSIDE YOUR HEAD, THE MAN IS ***DANGEROUS.***

WE'VE HAD ***TWO*** CHANCES TO CATCH HIM IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, BUT HE'S SLIPPED THROUGH OUR FINGERS BOTH TIMES.


THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED THE *FIRST* TIME...

SONY

I DON'T WANT TOMORROW NIGHT TO BE A REPEAT PERFORMANCE OF THAT.
IF THERE'S ANY *MUTILATION* GOING ON, I WANT IT TO BE DONE BY *MY* PEOPLE. ARE WE CLEAR?
SIR, YES SIR.
YES SIR.
YES SIR.

THIS IS SPECIAL AGENT W. HE'S OUR ***BAIT,*** BECAUSE TAO THINKS HE'S GOT SOMETHING ***SERIOUS*** FOR SALE. ***PRIORITY ONE*** IS HIS SAFETY.

IF IT COMES DOWN TO SAVING AGENT W OR CAPTURING TAO, I WANT--

BULLSHIT. YOU ALL KNOW COMMANDER LYNCH WELL ENOUGH TO KNOW WHAT HE REALLY WANTS.

AND YOU SAW WHAT THIS ANIMAL DID TO YOUR PREDECESSORS.

FOCUS ON THE TARGET. I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.

COMMANDER LYNCH?

YES?

YOU SAID THERE WERE ***TWO TIMES*** YOU ALMOST CAUGHT THIS TAO...

...WHAT HAPPENED THE ***SECOND*** TIME?

MOSTLY HE WAS JUST ***LAUGHING*** AT US...

THE BRITISH LIBRARY, ST. PANCRAS, LONDON. NINE AND A HALF MONTHS EARLIER...

THE BRITISH LIBRARY

MOVE FAST AND MOVE SILENT.

BRAVO TEAM LEADER TO COMMAND--WE'RE IN AND APPROACHING FAST.

ANY ADDITIONAL DATA ON WHAT *LEVEL* OUR TARGET IS ON?

I'M *MOBILE* AT THE MOMENT, SO THE ANSWER IS NO, BUT THE GODDAMN LIBRARY ISN'T EVEN OPEN TO THE *PUBLIC* YET, BRAVO LEADER.

HE *SHOULDN'T* BE HARD TO *FIND.*

WE'RE ON IT, SIR.

WE'RE HERE UNDER AUTHORITY FROM THE UNITED NATIONS BECAUSE OF A SERIOUS BREACH OF SECURITY.

I NEED LOCATIONS OF EVERY ACTIVE COMPUTER IN THE BUILDING.

--CO-COMPUTERS--?

BRAVO LEADER TO COMMAND--WE'VE GOT A LOCK ON HIS POSITION, MOVING IN NOW.

GOOD. I'M THREE MINUTES OUT FROM YOUR LOCATION, KEEP ME INFORMED.

MOVE, MOVE, MOVE...

SIR, I'VE GOT A ***MAN DOWN*** BY THE SERVICE ELEVATOR. LOOKS LIKE ONE OF THE PAINTERS.

BRAVO LEADER TO OMEGA TEAM--HAVE YOU STILL GOT THE SERVICE ENTRANCE COVERED?

WHAT THE HELL...?

OMEGA LEADER HERE--WE'VE SEEN NO MOVEMENT ***WHATSOEVER*** AT THIS POSITION.

DAMN IT. *HE'S ON THE MOVE.*

DOUBLE-CHECK ALL EXITS, AND SEND A SWEEPER TEAM DOWN TO THE BASEMENT. WE NEED TO FIND OUT WHO WAS HERE AND WHERE THE FUCK THEY WENT.

HE'S GONE?

WE'RE NOT SURE OF ***ANYTHING*** YET, SIR, BUT IT LOOKS THAT WAY.

FOUND THE COMPUTER THAT BREACHED THE SYSTEM, THOUGH. LOOKS LIKE HE ***PRINTED OUT*** A COPY OF WHATEVER THAT IS HE WAS LOOKIN' AT.

COCKY SON OF A BITCH EVEN LEFT IT OPEN.

SON OF A BITCH IS *RIGHT...*

COMMANDER LYNCH, IS THERE A ***PROBLEM?***

YES... OF COURSE THERE IS.

--THE HELL WAS IN HIS FREAKIN' I.O. FILE THAT WAS SUCH A BIG HAIRY DEAL?

YOU'RE MISSING THE ***POINT.*** HE GOT ONTO A ***PUBLIC LIBRARY*** COMPUTER, HACKED RIGHT INTO I.O.'S ***NETWORK,*** AND PROCEEDED TO ***DOWNLOAD*** HIS ***OWN*** FILE...

...THEN LEFT IT ONSCREEN LIKE A ***CALLING CARD.***

JUST LETTING ME KNOW HE COULD GET INTO OUR SYSTEMS ANYTIME HE WANTED.

SO, YOU'RE ***AVOIDING*** MY QUESTION, THEN? IS THAT THE DEAL?

FOR ***NOW,*** YES.

DO YOU WANT TO WALK THROUGH YOUR COVER ONE MORE TIME?

JESUS FUCKING CHRIST, JACK, YOU'VE KNOWN ME HOW MANY YEARS? THINK I NEED TO BE ***HANDHELD*** THROUGH A SIMPLE MISSION?

I'M A ***SMUGGLER,*** AND SOME UNSTABLE METAL ENDED UP IN MY POSSESSION. I'M LETTING IT GO CHEAP... YADDA YADDA YADDA...

HECK DOES HE WANT WITH ***UNSTABLE METAL,*** ANYWAY?

THAT'S SOMETHING ***I'D*** LIKE TO KNOW. IT'S MOSTLY USED FOR THE HULLS OF ***FASTER THAN LIGHT*** SPACE SHIPS. CAN'T IMAGINE ***WHAT*** PLANS THIS SICK FUCK HAS FOR IT.

YOU JUST BE ON YOUR TOES TOMORROW NIGHT.

MANHATTAN HARBOR, THE NEXT NIGHT.

COMMAND TO NIGHT TRADER-- WHAT'S YOUR STATUS?

ENTERING THE HARBOR NOW. HE'S ***SUPPOSED*** TO BE WAITING AT PIER 17.

HE COMES ONTO THE BOAT AND WE SPRING THE ***TRAP***, RIGHT?

ABSO-FUCKIN'-LUTELY.

COMMAND TO ALPHA LEADER-- ARE YOU IN POSITION?

YES SIR. I'VE GOT ***FIVE MEN*** ALL HOLDING, READY TO MOVE IN ON YOUR SIGNAL.

RIGHT.

COME ON, YOU BASTARD... LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH...

OKAY, LYNCH, I'M PULLING UP TO THE DOCK, AND IT LOOKS LIKE OUR BOY IS -:SKKTCCHH--PP-SKKSHHH:---AS EXPECTED.

COMMAND TO NIGHT TRADER -- COME AGAIN, I LOST PART OF THAT.

I SAID -:SKKRRRKKKKTTT:- AND HE'S -:SSKKK-POP-SKKHHHH:-

COMMAND TO NIGHT TRADER-- I'M *LOSING* YOU.

AND THERE GOES *VISUAL...*

GOD DAMN IT!

COMMAND TO ALPHA LEADER. WE'VE GOT A *PROBLEM.*

TAO MUST HAVE A *SIGNAL-JAMMER* ON HIM. I JUST LOST ALL CONTACT WITH THE YACHT.

WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO *DO*, SIR?

MOVE IN SLOWLY, KEEP TARGET IN SIGHT, BUT STAY HIDDEN.

SIR, YES SIR.

COMMAND TO ALPHA-- REPORT.

WE'VE GOT TARGET'S VEHICLE IN SIGHT, END OF PIER. TARGET AND SPECIAL AGENT W APPEAR TO BE ONBOARD SHIP.

MOVING IN.

WAIT. DO YOU ***SEE THEM*** ON THE SHIP?

WE HAVE NO VISUAL ON EITHER.

ALL RIGHT. ASCERTAIN THE TARGET'S POSITION BEFORE MOVING IN.

THAT SHIP IS A ***PERFECT TRAP,*** REMEMBER?

YES SIR... ALPHA LEADER TO ALPHA THREE. WE NEED AN S AND S ON THE VESSEL, ASAP.

ALPHA THREE, UNDERSTOOD.

ALPHA LEADER TO COMMAND--WE'VE GOT MOVEMENT NEAR THE WAREHOUSE BEHIND THE--

AAAIIEEE!

ALPHA LEADER-- ***REPORT!***

BLAM BLAM BLAM

ALPHA TWO TO COMMAND--ALPHA LEADER IS **DOWN.** THEY BURNED HIM **ALIVE.**

HOLD YOUR POSITION. I'M ON MY **WAY!**

SIR, THEY'RE **POST-HUMAN!** TARGET IS WORKING WITH **OTHER** POST-HUMANS!

IT WAS A SET-UP!

HEY! HEY, MOTHER-FUCKER! GET THE FUCK AWAY--

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM

KRAK KRAK

BLAM BLAM BLAM

SMAK

UNH--

I'D STAY RIGHT THERE IF I WERE YOU, COMMANDER JOHN LYNCH OF INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS...

...OR MY FRIEND THERE WILL DO A WHOLE LOT MORE THAN KNOCK YOU OFF YOUR FEET.

YOU MOTHERFUCKING SON OF--

WOULD THAT IT WERE SO, BUT I *HAD* NO MOTHER TO *FUCK*, COMMANDER, AS YOU WELL *KNOW*.

HOW DID YOU KNOW THIS WAS A TRAP?

OH, *THAT*... PETER?

YOUR OLD FRIEND WAS MORE THAN HELPFUL, ONCE HE DECIDED TO SEE *REASON*.

I'M *SORRY*, JACK, I'M SORRY. HE GETS--GETS INSIDE YOUR *HEAD* AND YOU--

PETER, COULD YOU SHUT HIM UP? FOR *GOOD* THIS TIME?

WITH PLEASURE.

AAAHHHHHIIEEEEE!

RRAAHHH--

KA-SNAP

JESUS CHRIST! STOP IT!

I'M SORRY, BUT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE A SITUATION YOU'RE IN CONTROL OF?

GENOCIDE?

KRAK

--AHHHH!

AM I GONNA GET TO *KILL* THIS TURD, TOO, TAO, OR DID I *MISS* ALL THE REAL FUN TONIGHT?

I'M SORRY, AGENT JONES... I KNOW I PROMISED YOU A LOT WHEN YOU JOINED OUR *ORGANIZATION*, BUT THIS ISN'T COMMANDER LYNCH'S TIME.

WHY DON'T THE BOTH OF YOU GO CHECK ON HOW THE OTHERS ARE DOING WITH THE CLEAN-UP.

I CAN HANDLE COMMANDER LYNCH IN HIS WEAKENED STATE, I THINK.

I WOULDN'T BE... SO SURE... ABOUT THAT...

OH, I KNOW YOU'RE TOUGH, OLD MAN... BUT I'VE SEEN WHAT GENOCIDE'S FISTS DO TO PEOPLE. HE'S BULLETPROOF, DID YOU KNOW?

LIKE GETTING HIT BY A SMALL BOULDER.

...WHAT THE FUCK DO... YOU WANT?

I SHOULD THINK THAT WOULD BE OBVIOUS TO YOU.

...SPELL IT OUT FOR ME...ANYWAY.

WELL, OBVIOUSLY, I'VE BEEN WANTING TO MEET YOU EVER SINCE I FOUND OUT THE TRUTH.

YOU SEE, I WAS QUITE CONFUSED ABOUT WHY I.O. WOULD HAVE ANY INTEREST IN ME, AND THOUGH I DIDN'T PUT TOO MUCH THOUGHT INTO IT AT FIRST...

...THE QUESTION WOULD POP INTO MY HEAD FROM TIME TO TIME. SO, LAST MAY WHEN I WAS IN LONDON, I DECIDED TO ANSWER IT.

BROKE INTO... OUR COMPUTER NETWORK...

YES, I DID, AND IMAGINE MY TOTAL LACK OF SURPRISE TO FIND OUT THAT OPTIGEN, THE LAB THAT GREW ME IN A TEST TUBE, WAS SECRETLY DOING WORK FOR I.O.

WHICH EXPLAINS THE TRACKING DEVICE PLANTED IN MY SINUSES.

NO, THE ONLY REAL SURPRISE CAME AT THE END OF MY SECRET LITTLE I.O. FILE...

...ON THE PIECE OF PAPER *AUTHORIZING* THE EXPERIMENT THAT CREATED ME.

PAFF

THAT IS *YOUR* SIGNATURE ON THERE, RIGHT?

...YES...

SO, *NOW* DO YOU GET IT?

...MAYBE...

I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW, *DAD*, THAT WHAT HAPPENS NEXT... WHAT I DO IN THIS WORLD THAT YOU *THINK* YOU CONTROL...

...I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW, *YOU* CREATED ME, *DAD*.

PIER 17

YOU MADE THIS ALL *POSSIBLE*.

TWO WEEKS LATER-- THE PENTAGON

NO SIR, I WAS *INCAPACITATED.* I HAD FOUR FRACTURED RIBS AND A BROKEN KNEE.

SO, YOU'RE TELLING ME HE'S IN THE WIND AGAIN? THAT YOU HAVE *NO IDEA* WHERE HE IS?

I'M AFRAID IT'S WORSE THAN THAT. I'M TELLING YOU THE ONLY REASON WE FOUND HIM IN THE *FIRST PLACE* IS BECAUSE HE *WANTED* TO BE FOUND.

WANTED ME TO KNOW HE'S TAKING US ON.

HE SEES ME AS SOME KIND OF FATHER FIGURE THAT HE NEEDS TO BRING DOWN. IT'S ALL VERY *OEDIPAL.*

DOESN'T THAT MEAN HE WANTS TO FUCK HIS MOTHER?

THAT'S JUST *ONE PART* OF THE STORY. THE REST IS ABOUT KILLING THE FATHER AND STEALING HIS KINGDOM.

WELL, THANK GOD YOU DON'T HAVE ONE OF *THOSE* THEN, EH?

SO...WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO ABOUT THIS?

I'D LIKE AUTHORIZATION TO *PHYSICALLY AUGMENT* SEVERAL AGENTS AND ATTEMPT TO PLACE THEM *UNDERCOVER* IN WHATEVER ORGANIZATION TAO HAS CREATED.

I.O. VISITOR

ABSOLUTELY NOT.

TEN HIGHLY-TRAINED AGENTS ARE ALREADY ***DEAD*** AT THIS MAN'S HANDS, AND ONE MORE IS IN THE PSYCHO WARD, PROBABLY FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE...

...SO, UNTIL I SEE SOME ***CONCRETE EVIDENCE*** THIS TAO IS RUNNING A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, YOU'RE NOT ENDANGERING ANYONE ELSE.

BUT MISTER SECRETARY--

I'M NOT HEARING ANY MORE, LYNCH. YOU CREATED THIS MONSTER OFF THE BOOKS, AND HE'S ***YOUR*** RESPONSIBILITY.

BUT THIS GOVERNMENT IS ***NOT*** LOSING ANY MORE PEOPLE TO YOUR PERSONAL VENDETTA.

...DAMNED FOOL...

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

COMMANDER LYNCH?

NOTHING, AGENT CARVER... NOTHING OF ANY ***CONSEQUENCE,*** AT LEAST...

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE DAYS WHEN PEOPLE USED TO ***LISTEN*** TO ME AROUND HERE...

YES SIR... I'M ***SURE*** THOSE WERE THE GOOD OLD DAYS.

EMPHASIS ON ***OLD,*** RIGHT?

YOU SAID IT, SIR, NOT ME...

Brubaker*Phillips*Strachan*Lopez*Quinn*Dunbier